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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DHAKA 000092

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [ETRD](#) [PTER](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: SENIOR HOME MINISTRY OFFICIALS PLEDGE CLOSER
COOPERATION WITH U.S.

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary
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¶1. (C) During an introductory courtesy call, the Ambassador and the Minister for Home Affairs pledged to expand U.S.-Bangladesh cooperation to fight terrorism and enhance security. The Ambassador briefed the Minister and State Minister on border security issues, USG engagement with the Rapid Action Battalion, and the proposed 1207-funded community policing program. The Ambassador thanked them for the Ministry's excellent cooperation on embassy security and stressed the importance of fighting Trafficking in Persons. The Ambassador also advocated for U.S. companies Motorola and Cogent, both currently seeking contracts to provide law enforcement equipment to Home Ministry dependencies. For their part, the Bangladeshi officials pledged to cooperate with the USG, stressing their commitment to implementing the Awami League's election manifesto. Based on this and other recent meetings, it appears State Minister for Home Affairs Sohel Taj will be a key interlocutor and trusted confidante of the Minister.

Ambassador Outlines Ambitious Counter Terrorism Agenda
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¶2. (C) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister of Home Affairs Sahara Khatun and State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj January 22. Pol/Econ Counselor (notetaker), Home Secretary Abdul Karim, and other Home Ministry officials also participated in the meeting. The Ambassador congratulated both Ministers on their election and selection for important Cabinet positions. The Ambassador stressed the close working relationship between the Embassy and the Home Ministry, adding he hoped these relations would improve further as we expanded our cooperation. The Ambassador said he had requested a courtesy call at the Home Ministry early on in order to provide an overview of the broad range of programs underway between our two countries.

¶3. (C) Both Ministers expressed appreciation for USG efforts prior to the elections to ensure a peaceful restoration of democracy. They shared the Ambassador's desire to see the bilateral partnership expand. The Ambassador noted that while both the U.S. and Bangladesh had recently undergone transitions, the fundamentals of the bilateral relationship continued unchanged. The U.S. focus remained the "three D's:" Democracy, Development, and Denial

of Space to Terrorism. Noting that the GOB had only been in office a few days, Minister Khatun said she was committed to seeing bilateral cooperation continue. Khatun said the people of Bangladesh had given Sheikh Hasina and her government a strong mandate. The GOB was committed to responding to the people's desires and fulfilling the pledges contained in the Awami League's election manifesto. Khatun introduced the State Minister as "young and very active" and she permitted him to carry most of the conversation. (Bio Note: Soheli Taj, who is a U.S. Legal Permanent Resident, is the son of assassinated former Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed. Soheli was five years old when his father was killed in November 1975.)

Awami League Commitment to Election Manifesto

14. (C) Soheli told the Ambassador the Awami League Manifesto would be the GOB's "guidebook for the future." He said Sheikh Hasina was committed to implementing the Awami League's "Vision 2021" and bringing forth a "digital, modern Bangladesh." He stressed the Manifesto's pledge of free universal education, respect for human rights, and liberty for all. Soheli said the people had given Sheikh Hasina a mandate, but she was mindful that the two-thirds majority could not be taken for granted. The GOB would need to deliver, and for this reason Hasina had chosen a cabinet that was "young, clean, and willing to work." Soheli pledged that the Home Ministry would not sully the image of the government or the country. Security and stability were essential to achieving the Vision 2021.

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South Asia Task Force

15. (C) The Ambassador outlined the range of USG programs underway to enhance Bangladesh's CT capacity and deny space to extremists. The Ambassador explained that over time democratization and development would reduce space available to extremists considerably, but in the short term tactical responses were also important. The Ambassador expressed support for the proposed "South Asia Task Force" against terrorism. Strong relations with India and Pakistan could allow the United States to play a facilitating role on CT issues within the region. The Ambassador told the Ministers the USG was considering possible exchange programs including representatives from regional states as part of our Regional Security Initiative.

Need to Strengthen Border security

16. (C) The Ambassador told the Ministers the USG had looked closely at Bangladesh's border security issues, and had assessed ways in which land, sea, and air port security could be strengthened. He shared a copy of the PACOM-funded border assessment with the Minister, noting this included a number of recommendations for training and equipment, as well as necessary procedural changes. The Ambassador said terrorists had exploited porous borders in the past to carry out attacks in India. The U.S. and Bangladesh had a shared interest in better securing borders to restrict the movement of terrorists, arms, narcotics and other illicit goods. The Ambassador added that the Embassy looked forward to talking more with the Ministry about ways to implement the report's recommendations. The Ambassador informed the Ministers of the February 1 - 3 visit by the Director of the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS). A number of military and civilian officials from Bangladesh had attended past APCSS courses, and the U.S. thought the Center had an important role to play in the future. The Home Secretary also recalled his visit to Washington in 2008 and highlighted the value of senior-level discussions between Bangladeshi and U.S. security officials.

Opportunities for Continued RAB Engagement
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17. (C) The Ambassador reiterated the USG's interest in helping to professionalize Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). He told the Ministers the USG had begun a program to enhance RAB respect for human rights and accountability. In our view, Bangladesh's citizens had confidence in the RAB because of its track record of effectiveness. That said, the Ambassador noted that the RAB had committed abuses in the past. For this reason, the RAB needed a transparent system for reporting and investigating alleged abuses. Moreover, those who committed abuses had to be held accountable. The Ambassador informed the Ministers that he had discussed this issue with the Prime Minister, who shared our concerns about past abuses but also supported engagement to remedy past problems. If the Human Rights phase succeeds, the U.S. may be able to provide other assistance to enhance RAB tactical capabilities. The State Minister agreed on the importance of human rights and promised the GOB would ensure that all law enforcement agencies protected human rights. The Ministers welcomed any assistance the USG could provide in this regard. The Home Secretary told the Ambassador there had been a great deal of discussion on the way forward with RAB and confirmed that the GOB was pleased engagement was underway. The Ambassador noted the RAB had an important role in fighting terrorism and drug trafficking.

Great Interest in Community Policing
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18. (C) The Ambassador also discussed the USG's interest in establishing community policing programs. The U.S. had designed a project using Section 1207 funds following an early 2008 interagency assessment which identified the need to strengthen ties between local communities and police, he

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noted. The Program's goal was to help build an effective police force, linked to the community, with adequate means of mobility and communication. The Ambassador said he had discussed this initiative with the Prime Minister, who was very supportive. The Ministers expressed interest in meeting with senior DOJ/ICITAP officials who will visit Bangladesh in early February to discuss program design. The Ambassador also told the Ministers the Embassy Resident Legal Advisor would continue to work with GOB counterparts including the Home Ministry on building capacity to fight corruption and other financial crimes.

19. (C) The Ministers informed the Ambassador that the GOB was convinced of the need to better integrate agency databases, for example, through leveraging the opportunities provided by the new national ID card program. The Ministry was looking at how to integrate information by updating antiquated reporting procedures and allocating resources more efficiently. In particular, the State Minister said the GOB needed to devote additional police resources to crime "hot spots." Integrated information systems would allow for better cooperation between national and international law enforcement agencies. At the same time, the GOB wanted to improve the conditions of service for police officers, especially by paying them an adequate wage. The State Minister said that a "living wage" for a police officer would be just over USD 200/month. While the budget would not allow this at present, it was worth aspiring towards this goal. The Ministry was also committed to transparency, and planned to establish independent internal affairs departments.

Thanks for Police Attention to Embassy Security
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10. (C) The Ambassador noted that his primary responsibility was to ensure the safety of the U.S. Mission and thanked the

Ministers for the excellent police support provided for Embassy security. For example, the police had responded well to a January 18 demonstration in the Diplomatic Enclave related to the situation in Gaza. The Ministers reassured the Ambassador that such support would continue.

Trafficking in Persons =====

¶11. (C) The Ambassador said the USG had worked closely with the Home Ministry to combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP), noting our requirement to submit an annual TIP report. In this regard he asked for the Ministry's assistance in providing necessary information to make the report useful. The Home Secretary said TIP programs were a priority for the Ministry and underscored the need to keep Bangladesh on Tier II. The Ambassador expressed hope that the Home Ministry would provide comments on a proposed USAID anti-TIP program so that the Letter of Intent could be finalized in the coming days.

Commercial Advocacy for Motorola and Cogent =====

¶12. (C) The Ambassador discussed the efforts of U.S. companies Motorola and Cogent to compete in tenders to supply law enforcement equipment to Bangladesh. Motorola was interested in supplying radios to the RAB and Cogent wanted to supply Automated Fingerprint Identification Systems (AFIS) to the police. The Ambassador informed the Ministers that in both cases the procurement process appeared stuck. The State Minister replied that the Hasina Administration was committed to transparency and good governance. He reaffirmed the importance of both projects and pledged the Ministry would look into both contracts. According to the State Minister, the new government did not want to waste any time and would exercise sound judgment in order to expedite the work of the Ministry.

Visas on Arrival =====

¶13. (C) The Ambassador asked the Ministers for assistance in resolving a problem related to changed procedures for obtaining airport visas for U.S. Diplomatic passport holders.

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Bangladeshi immigration officials had recently changed procedures that made this more restrictive, causing problems for USG travelers. The State Minister and Home Secretary said this had been a misunderstanding and promised it would be resolved. (Comment: As of 1/25, the offending charges appear to have been rescinded.)

Road Safety =====

¶14. (C) The State Minister explained his efforts to improve road safety by providing driver education programs and improving licensing procedures. The Ministry's goal was to reduce the 50,000 annual traffic fatalities through education, including focusing on impact on victims. The Ambassador applauded this initiative and suggested that the Embassy's Information Support Team could help the Ministry develop a public information campaign.

Comment =====

¶15. (C) This meeting was far more than a courtesy call. It addressed the breadth of our engagement on security, counter terrorism, and law enforcement. Both Ministers said all the right things and repeatedly stressed their desire to expand cooperation with the U.S. The dynamic between the Ministers was revealing, with the Home Minister deferring to the State Minister. The Home Minister seemed comfortable with allowing

her Deputy to carry the conversation, and both seemed at ease with the Home Secretary--a carry over from the Caretaker Government. The two Ministers make an odd couple with the taciturn 65 year old Minister clearly more than willing to let her young, dynamic underling take the lead. Still, we should be able to advance our law enforcement and counter terrorism agendas with the new team. We will look for ways to solidify the relationship, beginning with the February 2 - 4 visit by SOCOM's LTG Fridovich and PACOM's BG Boera.

MORIARTY